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WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS: A CONTENT  
ANALYSIS OF ASSOCIATED PRESS COVERAGE OF AFRICA.

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

Adukwu Samuel Atadoga  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2020

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Western media frames its coverage of Africa and this impact on Westerners' views of Africa. To develop the hypothesis and provide the data needed to answer the research questions, I reviewed the literature on framing, the determinants of international news coverage, as well as international media coverage. Newspapers were my data sources, and using LexisNexis with the key word "Africa," I searched the online news service of the Associated Press (AP). This search yielded 1,000 articles and was reduced by including only those published between January, 2015 and January, 2016, and then using random sampling. The final number of articles analyzed was 110. The data analysis used seven parameters: common issues (economy, health, war, politics, religion and social well-being), tone and depth of coverage, date published, cities covered, authors' country of origin, and sources quoted in the stories. Results of the analysis identified the top three issues covered by the AP during the period under study: social issues, political issues and other issues, i.e. education, tourism, conservation, sports, etc. My conclusions were that the AP stories lacked depth in coverage, continuity, credibility (over 65% of the sources cited were unidentified), and scope (the dominant focus was on individuals and South Africa).

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December 2020

This Study by: Adukwu Samuel Atadoga

Entitled: Western Media Coverage of International News: A Content Analysis of  
Associated Press Coverage of Africa from January 2015 to January 2016

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

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Profound appreciation to my family for standing by me and being the hype team, I need through this. On to the next one!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Negative perceptions about Africa date back to the days of Herodotus who suggested that Africa was not only different, but also more threatening, sinister and dangerous than Greece (Bates, 2012). From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the argument has been that Africa is a place of suffering because the slave trade provoked war, disease, famine and poverty (Poncian, 2015). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hegel wrote in his philosophy of history that Africa is not a historical continent and its people are capable of neither development nor education (Fage, 1981). Fage (1981) claimed that such perceptions about Africa continued beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial conquest. Academic discussions of controversies surrounding media images and themes depicting how the Third World is portrayed have been going on since the mid-1970s (Manzo, 2006).

The dominant perceptions about Africa held by Westerners, especially those who have not visited any part of the continent, are assumed to be mostly negative, according to Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) in their study:

We have also seen over time, how students react and express themselves about issues involving Africa and other ‘Third World’ places and are dismayed at the survival of outmoded stereotypes despite being in an information rich environment, where we are supposed to have more informed choice than previously. (p.15)

Anecdotally, this has been confirmed on a personal level through casual conversations with individuals in the United States. I have also observed that things known and said

about Africa are mostly linked with underdevelopment, poverty, deadly diseases, and wars. Little is usually said about the enterprising, thought provoking innovations and entertaining social activities going on in the continent (Africa). Little is also usually said about the beautiful and diversified cultures of the people and it is surprising that most of these folks assume the second largest continent of the world to be a country. Barbarism and an incapacity to develop until after they (Africans) met the (supposedly) superior races that brought them development and civilization has always been the framing of African stories (Poncian, 2015) in the Western media.

Africans who live in Africa perceive the Western world as a place of rescue; a place where answers to the problems of Africa as a continent can be answered. This perception is thought in media content to be the direct result of the stereotyping of the Westerners as more superior and all knowing when it comes to innovations and problem solving. Per Shahadah (2009):

Whites' role in narrating the African story is always to identify themselves, exaggerate their role, credit their genius, set agendas or locate their ideologies inside our story—not some of the time—but all of the time. But like innocent children we are so trusting we never ask who made it, and why (para. 9).

Scholarly research on the image of Africa in the Western world suggests that Africa and Africans have always been looked down upon by the Western nations from times past and, as such, racial theories were expounded to explain Africa's perceived backwardness (Poncian, 2015). In the 1980s and 1990s Africa was not only portrayed as dependent Africa but as "crisis and pitiable Africa" (Biney, 1997). According to an

article in the National Stereotype (2013), Africa's stereotypes are the most negative around the world. This article adds that, "whenever one thinks of Africa, one's attention is always divided between poverty and HIV/AIDS" (para. 2). Biney in her article on the subject claimed that these "mental images of Africa have their deep roots in a historical relationship of slavery and colonialism which was imposed in the continent" (para. 7).

Regarding the media's effect on perception of cultures and creation of meaning, Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) opine that one of the main and very influential institutions through which meanings are produced, is the media. Research suggests that international news stories account for a significant percentage of broadcast news content in the Western world (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). A two-part survey by Pew Research Center in 2016 revealed that 65% of U.S adults follow international news somewhat or very closely (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Combining Mahadeo and McKinney's idea on media effect, the Wanta et al. claim, and the result of Pew Research Center's survey on the significance of international news to broadcast news content in the Western world, it is justifiable to assume that individuals in the Western world mostly rely on the information propagated by the media to construct their knowledge of the real world.

O'Sullivan, Dutton, and Rayner (1998) proposed in their study that "the concept of representation embodies the theme that the media construct meanings about the world - they *represent* it, and in doing so, help audiences to make sense of it" (p.71). Comparing the O'Sullivan et al. claim with my experience when having conversations about Africa with individuals in the United States, it would be fair to claim that a certain

percentage of people in the Western world build their knowledge of Africa and other continents from the sense they make of what they are told by the media. Stories about Africa in the Western media are likely to build images of “poverty and war,” which are the typical context in which Africa is popularly discussed (Garrick, 2012).

With the cultural boundaries of the modern society blending into themselves because of globalization, it becomes pertinent to examine the imagery and connotations of the so-called Third World in post-colonial times by the Western media. Narrowing the scope of this study to perceptions of Africa, its coverage, framing and presentation in the Western media I will analyze news stories about Africa contained in the online news service of the *Associated Press* (AP) between January 1, 2015 and January 16, 2016. Articles from the *Associated Press* (AP) were used as unit of analysis because the AP is known to be one of the world’s largest news agency that distributes its content to over 1,700 newspapers and over 5,000 TV and radio stations. Its news content is seen by half of the world’s population on any given day (Associated Press, 2013). The United States of America is mostly cited as and interchangeably used with Western world in this study because of the physical location of the headquarters of the AP in the United States of America. On the credibility and reliability of its content, the AP is said to be fond of delivering a singular story told repeatedly, with shared headlines (Garrick, 2012).

This introduction examined perceptions of the third world by the Western world and specifically overviewed the role the media play in the perception of Africa in the Western world. It also identified the age-long problematic coverage of the continent (Africa) and introduced the focus of this study to be the examination of more recent

coverage, framing and presentation of Africa in the Western media using news covered by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 as the unit of analysis. The next section of this thesis reviews literature on the concept of international media coverage, determinants of international news coverage, framing, and Africa in the Western media.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature on Western media coverage of international news in general identifying the major players in coverage and factors that influence choice of coverage, i.e., country, city and issues, and expounds on discoveries and arguments of existing research on the coverage of African news by the Western media. Topics discussed in this chapter are structured under the subtitles of international media coverage, determinants of international news coverage, framing, and Africa in the Western media. The organization of the subtitles in this sequence is to aid the reader in gaining better knowledge of the concept of international media coverage, factors that influences the coverage (framing, determinants) and how these factors directly affects the coverage of Africa.

#### International Media Coverage

The mass media plays a vital role in the dissemination of information to a broad audience, especially to individuals who do not have the opportunity of being eyewitnesses of events that occur thousands of miles away from them. The function of news media as a tool for informing the public and shaping public opinion in America dates back centuries (Bowen, 2015). Every weekday, some 55 million newspaper copies are sold to readers in the United States, reaching about 20% of the nation's population (Fang & Peress, 2009). Scholars of media effects argue that exposure to media content influences people's perception of the real world. "Advertising and mass media contribute to the visual landscape that constructs reality" (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998, p. 161).

“Mass media has become the lens of mankind through which [people] see; the medium by which they interpret and report what they see. It is the semi-organized source of their identities” (Horowitz, 1963, p.406). Potter (2001) defines the mass media effect as “a change in an outcome within a person or social entity that is due to mass media influence following exposure to a mass media message or series of messages” (p. 903). According to Branson and Stafford (1999),

The media give us ways of imagining identities and groups which can have material effects on how people experience the world, and how they get understood, or legislated for or perhaps beaten up in the street by others [sic] this is partly because the mass media have the power to re-present, over and over, some identities, some imaginings, and to exclude others, and thereby make them seem unfamiliar or even threatening. (p.15)

These quotations illustrate the relationship between what individuals are exposed to in the media and the reality they construct from such exposure. Understanding Potter, Horowitz, and Schroeder and Borgerson’s writings on the concept of media effect, it is fair to argue that the mass media contributes to how individuals define their own cultures, as well as cultures that are not like theirs. Being aware of the strong impact of the media on peoples’ perception of the real world, it becomes important to evaluate the credibility of the information propagated by the media.

A body of research suggests that Africa as a continent has received limited coverage by the Western media (Golan, 2008; Paik, 1999; Weaver et al., 1984). The United States television news media, for instance, is accused of the continued focus of its



coverage of international news on a limited number of nations and regions (Golan & Wanta, 2003). A content analysis of 33,159 *Wall Street Journal* articles that focused on international news from 1990 to 1992 by Paik (1999) found that Western Europe dominated international news with 37% of coverage, followed by Asia with 24%. It is worth noting that Golan & Wanta's research did not present any result specifically on the coverage of Africa.

To examine the level of attention given to Africa by the Western media in reportage of international news, a content analysis of four US television newscasts during the entire year of 1999 by Golan and Wanta found that “only 33 out of 3183 international news stories focused exclusively on African nations. Examining the depth of the coverage of African news by the Western media, Biney (1997) found in her study that the information presented in the Western media about Africa often lacks historical and analytical examination to explain the roots of the conflict hence the media “attributes all conflicts in Africa to primordial irrationality and tribalism” (para. 13). So, to summarize (citing the 2016 study I noted above), 65% of Americans follow international news somewhat or very closely, but they are finding out little about Africa, and the stories that do cover Africa cover it poorly, in a stereotypical way.

Drawing an argumentative stand from academic discussions on media effect, I agree with the notion that the framing and presentation of a news story is likely to influence how the event covered in the news is perceived. Individuals exposed to news stories about a country are likely to build their reality of said country from the sense they make from the stories they read. According to Mitchell, Matsa, Weisel, and Klein (2019),

71% of Americans believe that stories reported by the national news media are accurate. Understanding the tenets of media effects and the news consumption habits of Westerners, one can argue that people who have not visited any African country or who do not have access to alternative means of fact checking stories presented in the news about events in Africa are likely to adopt the information contained in the source they are exposed to and therefore build their reality of the event based on how it is framed by the accessed media.

On a wider spectrum, Western news reporting services are portrayed globally as being neutral and impartial and the journalists as neutral and balanced arbiters (Biney, 1997). There are arguments that this portrayal of Western news reporting services as “neutral and balanced arbiters” are being used by the Western media to depict present allies more favorably. One such argument is supported by Östgaard (1965) who accused the Western media of treating the cultures of the industrialized nations as superior and placing them at the top of an imaginary hierarchy and placing the cultures of the developing nations at the bottom of the hierarchy. While Östgaard made his assertion over fifty years ago, it seems to still exist as the normative model for covering international events that are considered newsworthy. The root cause of the poor attention on developing nations in coverage is argued to be due to the dependency of most media organizations in developing nations on the Western media for information on events that occur in other parts of the world and even within their localities (Gathara, 2014).

That the Western media is more advanced in technology and programming is a statement of fact. Just like it is with other new technologies, Western countries were the

first to grasp the strategic implications of radio communication after the first radio transmissions of the human voice in 1902 (Thussu, 2006). Thus, Western media organizations over the years have expanded and grown, have greater funding and are more equipped than the media organizations that are locally owned and operated in developing nations. Hence, the Western media can afford high quality facilities and equipment needed to cover news events in different locations of the world concurrently and in a timely manner.

When it comes to content selection, framing and presentation, news directors, limited by time and space, often must select only a handful of stories on international events, while leaving dozens of news stories off the air (Wanta et al., 2004). Taking a deeper dive into exploring this approach of news coverage and editing, there is a likelihood they will miss or misinterpret important details and information of a newsworthy event. The perspective of the locals who are at the scene of covered events also stands the risk of being misplaced or misinterpreted (Nyabola, 2014) when media staff are foreigners who do not understand some of the cultural ingredients or bias of such covered events. Further expounding on the focus of this study (coverage and presentation of Africa), the United States media gatekeepers, for example, are accused of viewing Africa as a relatively non-newsworthy continent (Makunike, 1993; Ebo, 1992; Golan & Wanta, 2003).

Interestingly, a claim contrary to the conclusions of the studies of Makunike and others is explored in the survey of newspaper readers by Hargrove and Stempel (2002). Their study found that most readers were just as interested in news from Africa as they

were in news from Western Europe and more interested in news stories from the African continent than they were in stories from Southeast Asia. This unique discovery prompted this study to examine the determinants of international news coverage. This examination is an effort to educate the reader on factors that influence the selection of what is deemed newsworthy or not by the Western media.

### Determinants of International News Coverage

A study of 29 countries' news media by the UNESCO found similarities in the focus of news stories reported and, in the sources, interviewed (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah, 1985). While their study suggests that journalists all over the world hold similar views on what stories should be newsworthy or not, it is important to remember that similarity in news content from different sources could also be as a result of different news agents collecting their stories from a single source (i.e., the *Associated Press*). In my study on the determinants of international news coverage, I found Makunike's (1993) experience with an editor of a Western media organization enlightening:

When I asked an editor to explain these decisions (about what is newsworthy or not), he told me that stories on Africa are routinely ignored because of a presumed lack of reader interest. "You see," he said, "America does not know Africa well. It never had a colony on that continent. Thus, unless the story has a strong human-interest potential, there is no point using it, since no one will read it (p. 11).

Reviewing Makunike's report, the phrase; "unless the story has a strong human-interest potential" is one that I interpret to mean emotional appeal is a factor that attracts interest

in news stories for the Western public. I further interpret this statement to mean that most events and news in developing nations (especially Africa) are not emotionally relevant to Western readers and are therefore not frequently covered and reported by the Western media. Golan (2008) documented in his research that a review of the wide body of scholarship on the determinants of international news coverage revealed four key variables that were consistently found to predict international news coverage. Golan identified these variables as: Deviance (Shoemaker et al., 1986), Relevance (Chang et al., 1987), Cultural Affinity (Hester, 1973) and The Prominence of the Nation within the Hierarchy of Nations (Chang, 1998; Kim & Barnett, 1996). For this study, I will briefly paraphrase the tenets of these determinants of international news coverage by the Western media as contained in the study of Golan.

Deviance as a determinant of international news coverage states that events or experiences that deviate from normalcy or what is considered a norm by the Western society attracts the attention of the Western media. Per Shoemaker et al. (1991), “the deviance dimension is composed of novelty/oddity/unusual (statistical deviance), prominence (normative deviance), sensationalism (normative or pathological deviance) and conflict or controversy (normative deviance)” (p. 783). Shoemaker in the same study states that events that have the potential to change the United States norms also have the tendency to be covered by the United States media.

Several scholars of mass communication are of the opinion that media selection of news coverage is driven by profit (Hawk, 1992; Perse, 1998; Mitchell & Schoeffel, 2002; Shoemaker et al., 1986). News is a commodity and its profit influence the categorization

of events as newsworthy by American media and determines how they allocate their resources all over the world (Hawk, 1992). For a country to be considered newsworthy, it must have a sort of business connection with the Western world. Chang and Lee (1992) in their study found that threats to the United States and the involvement of the United States in the economic and political activities of a nation are key factors that influence the newspaper editors' news selection process. A content analysis of news stories printed between 1980 and 1990 by Riffe (1996) found that 39% of international news covered by *The New York Times* had some linkage to U.S interests.

Hester (1973) in a study proposed that viewers and gate keepers of news events are likely to relate more closely and be more interested in events that occur in a culture that is similar to theirs. The idea of cultural similarities does not exclude immigration and language. The claim of this determinant is that events that occurred in English-speaking nations (i.e., Great Britain) received more attention in coverage than similar events that occurred in nations (i.e., Kenya) that do not share a common language with the United States (Golan, 2008).

The rank of a nation in the hierarchy of nations is identified to be a significant determinant of international news coverage (Kim & Barnett, 1996; Östgaard, 1965; Galtung, 1971; Chang, 1998). The idea of hierarchy of nations is based on the world system theories developed by Wallerstein (1974). The theory classified world system of nations into three categories namely: Core, Peripheral and Semi-Peripheral nations. The core category is made up of Western industrialized nations (Chang, 1998). The core nations form a world news system that acts as a filter through which international news

must pass. Nations with strong ties to these core nations are said to receive more attention from the Western media in terms of coverage than nations with lesser ties (Golan & Wanta, 2003). Per the tenets of this concept of hierarchy of nations, large and powerful nations such as China and Russia are likely to be viewed by media gatekeepers as more salient than smaller, less developed nations like Mali or Moldova (Golan, 2008). One argument for this special treatment given to some nations in international media coverage is that elite nations have better developed communication infrastructures that makes gathering and transmitting of information easier (Östgaard, 1965).

Having reviewed literatures on the determinants of International News coverage, the next section of this research examines the theoretical framework of this study. This study is based on the framing theory of mass communication. The theoretical implication of this is that people would most often build their knowledge of the world from what they see in the media.

### The Concept of Framing

Agenda-setting originally formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972) is recognized as the most powerful theory that describes media effect. To analyze how African stories are covered by the Western media, this study adopts “Framing” as the most significant academic concept. Framing is a media effect concept employed by media practitioners and individuals to influence behaviors and attitudes. It is a media concept that is closely related with agenda setting and priming based on premises (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Media effects were much more complex in nature than previously assumed, Scheufele and Tewksbury argued and depended heavily on people’s

homogenous networks and their selective informational diets which reinforced existing attitudes rather than changed them. Thus in analyzing news coverage, framing proposes that a part of a story is made more salient (noticeable) and projected by the media in a way that influences how the entire story is perceived.

Framing is often traced back to both psychology and sociology (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1982), who are credited for the psychological origin of the concept, examined how different presentations of identical decision-making scenarios influence people's choices and their evaluation of the options presented to them. Goffman (1974) and other scholars of sociology who are credited for the sociological root of framing assumed that individuals continually struggle to interpret life experiences and make sense of the world around them. Goffman (1974) argues that for individuals to process new information efficiently, they must apply "interpretive schemas or primary frameworks" (p. 24) to meaningfully interpret and classify information.

Entman (1993) defined framing as "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). Goffman further defined framing as schemata of interpretations that enable individuals to locate, identify and label events or life experiences. Expounding on the definitions given by Entman and Goffman, I see framing as the organized process employed by a news writer or producer to influence/shape the perception of the receiver on a subject matter, topic or culture. As supported by some of the articles reviewed in this study, popular framing of African



stories in Western media is identified as the practice of usually reporting on outsiders' efforts to improve the living conditions of Africans rather than show Africans working to improve their villages, cities and countries (Nittle, 2012). Because framing focusses not so much on what topics or issues are selected for coverage, but instead on the ways those issues are presented, the framing of news from Africa by the Western media projects the continent as persistently needy and seeking the help of other nations to survive and develop.

In my review of articles on the concept of framing, I observed that the concept identifies, evaluates and offers recommendations to the public on cultures and topics in a systemic way. This cycle of identifying, evaluating and making recommendations is skillfully created with a set of logical arguments with a persuasive language by the writer. Entman (1993) proposed that framing is found in four cardinal points in the communication cycle that exists between the media and the public. The first point is identified in the communicator's ability to project his/her bias through the selection of what to include or exclude from a news event. The second point is in the body of the text. Every text is framed in a language that expresses the perception of the authority behind it. Hence, a text cannot be separated from the bias of the source. The third point is in the understanding of the receiver. Framing is said to be present in the sense a receiver makes of a text. The source or writer of a text can influence how the text is framed but cannot entirely influence how the receiver perceives the text. Two people are bound to make different sense of a single situation or scenario.

Lastly, Entman (1993) claimed that framing is also existent in the communication culture. His argument is that culture plays a vital role in the construction of frames because cultural molding and experiences of an individual are likely to influence how the individual will perceive an event or situation and how one sees a story influences how he/she would tell the story. For instance, being an outsider, my point of view on Bernie Sanders' candidacy for the Democratic Party in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections would differ from how an American would perceive the same situation.

According to Entman's (1993) four cardinal points in the communicative relationship that exists between the media and the public, framing can therefore be theorized to have common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all (Entman, 1993). Receivers' responses are clearly affected if they perceive and process information about one interpretation and possesses little or incommensurable data about alternatives. The way information is transferred from a communicator to recipients comes through various forms of communication all of which are framed to meet the goals of the providing source (Cissel, 2012). The way individuals classify information also adds to the framing theory and framing is a macro level and a micro level construct (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). "As a macro construct, the term 'framing' refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12). In communication, framing defines how media coverage and presentation shapes mass opinion by purposely using specific language to guide audience's understanding of a

situation or event. After reviewing literatures on framing, I agree with Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) that framing is a tool used by media content producers to shape the perception of their audience.

### Africa in the Western Media

The role of the press in every society is to communicate with its readers the way it understands and interprets the world. It is believed Africa has received limited coverage by the Western media (Golan, 2008; Paik, 1999; Weaver et al., 1984). In-depth coverage of Africa has not been a top priority for Western media (Garrick, 2012). From the 16<sup>th</sup> century towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ideas about Africa were mostly disseminated by missionaries, colonial administrators and merchants (Biney, 1997). In global conversations about Africa, 53 nations are often lumped together as one while the continent is often portrayed as a crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilization (Ebo, 1992). More than 50 years after attainment of political independence, Africa is still viewed negatively by Westerners (Poncian, 2015). Africa has been portrayed as a dark continent in need of civilization, and its heathen in need of enlightenment through slavery and colonization. Evaluating the claims that Africa is poorly covered by the Western media, there is a body of research arguing that the activities of interest groups, policymakers, journalists, and other groups interested in shaping media agendas and frames influences the “volume and character” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p.12) of news messages about Africa. Gatekeeping theory expounds on the involvement of these societal heavy weights with media gatekeepers (i.e., reporters,

editors and producers) in filtering the information being presented to the audience (see Bass, 1969).

An analysis of news stories from Africa that appeared in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from the end of March to Mid-August of 2000 argued that all 89 published articles lacked sufficient context (Ojo, 2012) and were negatively framed. Ojo further claimed that most news stories about Africa are presented as tribal conflicts with strong metaphors and imagery of “savages” and “beasts” in which people with the “hearts of darkness” are killing themselves for no reason or dying from AIDS. (p. 2). Research on the topic found that rather than show Africans working to improve their villages, cities and countries, Western journalists usually report on outsiders’ efforts to improve living conditions of Africans (Nittle, 2012; Golan, 2008; Makunike, 1993). Reflecting on his role as a reporter that covered news in Africa, one-time Asian born BBC African correspondent Alagiah (1999) confessed in *The Guardian*: “My job is to give a fuller picture. [But] I have a gnawing regret that, as a foreign correspondent, I have done Africa a disservice, too often showing the continent at its worst and too rarely showing it in full flower” (para 4). Alagiah’s confession is one of several by media reporters/agents that previously covered Africa for the Western media. These confessions support the claim that stories from Africa are being manipulated by Western media gatekeepers to fit the negative narrative. According to Makunike (1993):

We hear about famines and coups, but not the rejuvenation of its cities and the cultural vitality of its village life...about oppression and massacres, but not education, economic self-help and political development...about poaching and

habitat destruction, but not ongoing active efforts at conservation, reforestation and environmental awareness (p. 12).

Africa is often viewed as a vast black hole fringed by Libya and South Africa which per research are the two most covered countries in the continent. Except for these two countries (which are countries that had white leadership the longest), both propelled by extreme convictions, Africa is considered as a continent that is not a player in the great global power game. In short, Africa is not deemed to be newsworthy (Fitzgerald, 1987). Issues in Africa are usually referred to as issues in Africa. Being country specific in labeling newsworthy events in Africa is treated as optional in international news. Could the African experience be unilateral? How did we get to cover Africa in such general terms (Garrick, 2012)? Why do the media focus on the slums and not on the positive stories? “Why search out the most miserable environments to film in and continue propagating negative stereotypes of Africa as a nest of poverty and problems?” (Adekoya, 2013, para 2). The diverse cultures of African countries and lifestyle are often found to be missing in global discussions.

The pictures of Africa that emerges in the Western media is often vastly different from the reality. In an article, Nyabola, (2014) recounts a story that was a misinterpretation of an event in South Sudan published by *The Guardian*:

A *Guardian* correspondent offered an analysis of an on-going crisis in South Sudan that, judging from the comments on the website, was well received outside South Sudan. Yet, the reaction from the South Sudanese online community was

the opposite. Relatively well-known *twitterati* roundly criticized the article as a complete misread of the situation on the ground (para 1-2).

This is one instance of misinterpretation of an event in coverage. In this situation, it is a case of wrong interpretation of the language codes of South Sudan by the Western reporter that resulted in the wrong framing. Though it is recognized the world over that the media focuses more on the coverage of negative events, research suggests that there are certain criteria that influences Western media's reportage on Africa in the manner they have been doing for decades. These criteria are identified as commercial interests, socio cultural bias and political interests (Ebo, 1992). Makunike (1993) posits that:

For American readers or viewers to be interested, news out of Africa must be negative. It must conform to the traditional stereotypes in its spotlight on grotesque and sensational events. It must show misery, corruption, mismanagement, starvation, primitive surroundings and, as in the case of Somalia, chaos and outright anarchy (para. 12).

Looking at the effect that the poor coverage of Africa by the Western media has on how Westerners perceive Africa, Suge, as cited in Nittle, (2012) claimed that:

The single perennial thread is so synonymous with the continent that it is hard for people to accept that there's another side to the story...If a coup breaks out in West Africa and I am going to East Africa, I get cautionary emails from colleagues telling me to be careful. That story has shrunk Africa to one country full of every piece of bad news the mind can think of (para. 12 -13).

One cannot speak of the persistence of Western negative presentation and perception of Africa without contextualizing it in the way Africans characterize and present the continent before the West (Poncian, 2015). An angle that I looked at in examining literature on the subject (i.e., Western media coverage of Africa and how it affects the way people perceive the continent) is the efforts Africans are making towards changing the claimed popular rhetoric of poverty, poor health, war and political instability. The continued use of negative labels to describe Africa suggests that Africans are doing little to define themselves otherwise. The act of adopting the negative labels used in defining Africa by Africans in defining themselves is a factor Poncian identified as encouraging people from the Western world to cling on their perception about Africa. Most African leaders are accused of *adding color* to the negative images associated with Africa at international gatherings.

If poverty, conflicts, diseases, etc. continue to provide the political leaders with an easier route to attract foreign aid, they continue to reinforce these images and at times would want to make international allies believe that these are what define Africa. African political leaders tend to say little about the impact of local initiatives in the growth and development of the economy of their country.

The review of literature for this study covered the concept of International Media Coverage, Determinants of International Media Coverage, Framing, and Africa in the Western Media. This thesis attempts to answer the following research questions through the presentation of descriptive statistics on the *Associated Press*' coverage of African events from January 2015 to January 2016.

RQ 1. What are the dominant issues contained in *Associated Press* coverage of news in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016?

RQ 2. What are the dominant frames in *Associated Press* presentation of these news events?



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the topic/issue focus of the Western media in covering news stories from Africa and present how these covered stories are framed. This study examined the coverage and framing of news stories out of Africa by the *Associated Press* from January 2015 to January 2016. A quantitative content analysis was conducted for this study. Content analysis has proven to be an effective tool in examining the framing of news articles (Entman, 1993). Per Neuendorf (2002) content analysis has been a fast-growing technique in the world of quantitative research (p. 1). Neuendorf briefly defined content analysis as the “systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (p. 1). Content analysis has been used to study various issues that focused on how the media influences perceptions of objects or individuals.

The data for this study came from the international news section of the online news service of the Associated Press. The Associated Press was selected because it claims to be one of the world’s largest news agencies that distributes its content to over 1700 newspapers and over 5,000 TV and radio stations, and its news content is seen by half of the world’s population on any given day (Associated Press, 2013). There are 1,400 US newspapers that subscribe to the AP and thousands of television and radio broadcast subscribers and they have offices across the globe. These numbers indicate that the AP provides a great deal of news across the US and is a leader in foreign news. The time of January 2015 to January 2016 was chosen because this study attempts to observe a more recent trend in the coverage and presentation of Africa by the Western media.

Additional data for this study was collected from existing literatures on Western media coverage of international news, the concept of framing, and Africa in the Western media.

To collect the data (newspapers) analyzed for this study, a LexisNexis search with the key word “Africa” was conducted on the online news service of the Associated Press. This key word was used to ensure that the returned articles would cover diverse issues. The search yielded 1000 articles with stories about Africa. All stories not covered between January 2015 and January 2016 were excluded bringing the total number of articles to 303. A simple random sample of 110 articles was produced from the 303 articles to be certain that each article had an equal chance of being chosen (Urbaniak & Plous, 2007). These 110 articles were coded with a coding sheet developed for this study (see appendix for the coding sheet). Seven of the 110 articles were thrown out of the sample during analysis because they covered same story. A total of 103 relevant articles remained after all exclusions were applied.

Having identified “economy”, “health”, “war”, “politics”, “religion” and “social well-being” as common issues previous studies claimed to be persistent in Western media coverage of Africa, probing categories such as the tone of the stories being presented - positive, negative, neutral or combination, the date these stories were published, the city the stories covered, the level of attention given to the coverage of the issues (depth of coverage), the authors of the stories, country of origin of article authors, source(s) quoted in the stories, and the scope of the stories were developed to identify and present the top 3 dominant issues in Western media coverage of Africa between January 2015 and January 2016 and how they were framed. To code articles into the identified categories, an

invitation to participate in the coding session of 103 articles was sent to a group of graduate students of a small Midwestern college. A total of three communication graduate students and one graduate student from the department of geography attended the coding session. To refresh attendees' knowledge of quantitative content analysis, Dr. Tom Hall started the coding session with tutorials on the principles and procedures of quantitative content analysis. After the tutorial, the categories and units of measurement were defined and agreed upon (see appendix). A random sample of ten articles were selected and coded by each of the coders to ensure that all had a shared understanding of operational definitions and to ensure that a basic level of reliability had been established (see appendix for coding instructions).

Coders randomly selected the printed copies of the articles and took them home with the coding sheets. All articles were coded and returned within 48 hours. The dominant issues identified in *Associated Press* coverage of Africa and how they were framed was determined by adding up numbers and analyzed applying the concept of basic descriptive statistics which according to Babbie (2009) describes the basic features of the data in a study and provides simple summaries about the study sample and the measures (p. 436) and the concept of narrative analysis.

Stories are not created in a social vacuum but are molded by a social context and interaction between the storyteller and the audiences. Narrative analysis as a qualitative approach is applied in this study to enable us to understand the role stories play in the construction of identity (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). "Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities

may be fashioned” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1). Opposed to the traditional approach of involving the researcher in the production of the data, this study is using this approach to make sense of a set of themes generated from a quantitative secondary data. This approach in the analysis of data in this study focused on identifying story’s plot, setting and characterization (Earthy & Cronin, 2008) to help the reader understand the way in which the stories are constructed and developed through selective inclusions and exclusion of issues covered.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION

This chapter presents the data analyzed for this study in order of frequency. Though “other” is the biggest category, I present the data last. Also, because only one percent of the articles analyzed covered “religious” themed story, I add this category to “other” in my presentation and analysis. Findings on the themes of African events that received more coverage from the AP between January 2015 and January 2016 and how the covered issues were framed is presented in six categories: Social, Politics, Health, War, Economy and Others. I analyze the top 3 themes using selected sample content and discuss the implications in the next chapter.

#### Social Issues

Social problems encompass issues that a small to representative group of people within a society disagree with or find undesirable. Research identified the prominent terms used by the Western media when reporting news on social issues in Africa as poverty, rape, disease, corruption, famine, and the inability to develop (Poncian, 2015; Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007; Bates, 2012; Fage, 1981). Articles that reported African news from January 2015 to January 2016 were collected from the online news services of the *Associated Press*. Each article was analyzed to identify the issues/stories it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage.

This study found that 33 (32%) of the 103 articles reported on “social” issues in Africa. Eleven (33%) of these stories were “positively framed,” nine (27%) were

“negatively framed,” 12 (36%) were “neutrally framed” and one (3%) was coded as being framed with a “combination” of negative, positive and neutral tones. Table 1 below show the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all stories on Social issues in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016.

Table 1

*Sources Quoted in Social Issue Articles*

<b>Sources</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local resident	20	61%
Local news agencies	3	9%
Government officials	5	15%
Associated Press reporter	1	3%
Religious representative	1	3%
Health representative	1	3%
Foreign government official	1	3%
Human right activists	1	3%
Law enforcement agencies	3	9%
Other	10	30%

This study found that 20 (61%) of the stories on “social” issues focused on stories about “single individuals.” Three (9%) focused on “social” news in “cities” of African countries, two (6%) reported news on “social” events in “regions” of Africa and five

(15%) focused on “social” news in African “countries.” From the result of this study, eight (24%) of stories on “social” issues in Africa were authored by the “AP editorial,” 14 (42%) authored by “AP reporters of African origin,” four (12%) were authored by “AP reporters of Western origin,” and seven (21%) were authored by “other” media personnel. Examining the depth of coverage, this study found that 31 (94%) of the stories were presented as “new Stories”, one (3%) as “continuing” stories and one (3%) as “unknown.” For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 see figure 1.

### Politics

Articles that reported African stories from January 2015 to January 2016 were collected from the web news services of the *Associated Press*. Each article was analyzed to identify the issues/stories it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage. This study found that 21% of the 103 articles covered politics in Africa. Three (15%) of the stories on politics were “positively framed,” 12 (60%) were “negatively framed,” and five (2%) were “neutrally framed.” Examining articles to identify authors, this study found that two (10%) of the stories on politics were written by the “AP editorial,” seven (35%) were written by “AP reporters of African origin,” four (20%) were authored by “AP reporters of Western origin,” and seven (3%) were authored by “other” media personnel (see appendix for coding scheme). This study found that 17 (85%) of the stories on politics were reported as “new stories,” and three (15%) as “continuing stories.” This study also found that three (15%) of the stories on politics reported events happening in “regions” of

the continent. Three (15%) of the stories reported events about “single individuals,” One (5%) reported on story happening in “cities” of African countries and 14 (70% ) of the articles reported political activities in African “countries.”

Table 2 below shows the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all political stories.

Table 2

*Sources Quoted in Politics Articles*

<b>Sources</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local resident	3	15%
Government officials	14	70%
Associated Press reporter	1	5%
Religious representative	1	5%
Foreign government official	1	5%
Human right activists	2	10%
Law enforcement agencies	4	20%
Other	5	25%

For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 see figure 1.



### Health

Articles that reported African news from January 2015 to January 2016 were collected from the online news services of the Associated Press. Each article was analyzed to identify the issues/stories it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage. Examining all 103 articles to identify the type of issues covered, this study found that 15 (15%) of the 103 articles focused on “health” issues in Africa. Four (27%) of these stories on “health” issues” were “positively framed,” three (20%) were “negatively framed,” and eight (53%) were “neutrally framed.” Table 3 below shows the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all stories on Health issues in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016.

Table 3

*Sources Quoted in Health Articles*

Sources	Numbers	Percentage
Local resident	9	60%
Local News Agencies	1	7%
government officials	1	7%
Associated Press Reporter	1	7%
religious representative	1	7%
health representative	1	7%
Other	5	33%

The result of the study revealed that eight (53%) of the stories on health issues in Africa reported in the AP focused on “single individuals,” one (7%) focused on “health” stories in “cities” of African countries, two (13%) focused on “health” issues happening in “regions” of Africa, three (20%) focused on “health” stories happening in African “countries” and two (13%) of the coverage focused on “continent” wide “health” issues. This study found that one (7%) of the stories on health issues were authored by the “AP editorial,” four (27%) were authored by “AP reporters of African origin,” and eight (53%) of the stories were authored by “other” media personnel. Probing the articles to identify the depth of coverage, this study found that 87% of the stories were reported as “new Stories”, and 27% as “continuing” stories. For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 (see figure 1).

### War

Articles that reported African news stories from January 2015 to January 2016 were collected from the online news services of the Associated Press. Each article was analyzed to identify the issues/stories it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage. This study found that 13 (13%) of the 103 articles reported stories about “war” related issues in Africa. One (8%) of these stories on “war” was “positively framed,” 10 (77%) were “negatively framed,” and two (15%) were framed with a “combination” of “negative,” “positive” and “neutral” tones. Table 4 below shows the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all stories on war in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016.

Table 4

*Sources Quoted in War Articles*

Sources	Numbers	Percentage
Local News Agencies	1	8%
Government officials	2	15%
Foreign government official	1	8%
Human right activists	4	31%
Law enforcement agencies	2	15%
Other	4	31%

This study found that one (8%) of the stories focused on “single individuals,” one (8%) focused on “war” in “regions” of Africa, eight (62%) reported “war” news in African “countries” and three (23%) focused on “war” activities happening on the “continent.” This study found that three (23%) of the stories on “war” in Africa were authored by “AP reporters of African origin,” three (23%) authored by “AP reporters of Western origin,” and seven (53%) were authored by “other” media personnel. Examining articles to identify the depth of coverage; this study found that four (31%) of the stories were reported as “new Stories” and nine (69%) were reported as “continuing” stories. For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 see figure 1.

### Economy

Articles that reported African news from January 2015 to January 2016 were obtained from the Associated Press online news service. Each article was analyzed to identify the type of issue/story it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage. Of the 103 articles coded, 11 articles (11%) focused on stories about economy. Four articles (36%) on economy were coded as “positively framed,” five articles (46%) as “negatively framed,” and two articles (18%) as “neutrally framed.” One (9%) of the authors of the stories on economy were identified as the “AP editorial,” six (55%) as “AP reporters of African origin.” One (9%) as “AP reporters of Western origin” and three (27%) as “other” media personnel. Examining the depth of coverage, this study found that 10 (91%) of the stories on economy were coded as “new stories,” and one (9%) as “continuing stories”. Table 5 below shows the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all stories on economy.

Table 5

#### *Sources Quoted in Economics Articles*

Source	Number	Percentage
Local resident	1	9%
Government officials	7	64
Other	2	18%

Examining the “scope” of coverage of all stories on economy, this study found that nine (81%) of the stories focused on “country” related economic activities/events. One (9%) reported “regional stories,” and one (9%) reported stories on the economy of the continent. For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 see figure 1.

#### Other

Articles that reported African news from January 2015 to January 2016 were collected from the online news services of the Associated Press. Each article was analyzed to identify the issues/stories it covered, who wrote the story, the tone used in framing the story, the sources quoted in the story and the scope of coverage. Examining all 103 articles to identify the issues covered, this study found that 46 (48%) of the 103 articles reported stories on “other” issues in Africa. 14 (30%) of these “other” stories were “positively framed,” 23 (50%) “negatively framed,” and nine (20%) “neutrally framed.” Table 6 below shows the result of the data presented as “sources quoted” in all stories on “other” issues in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016.

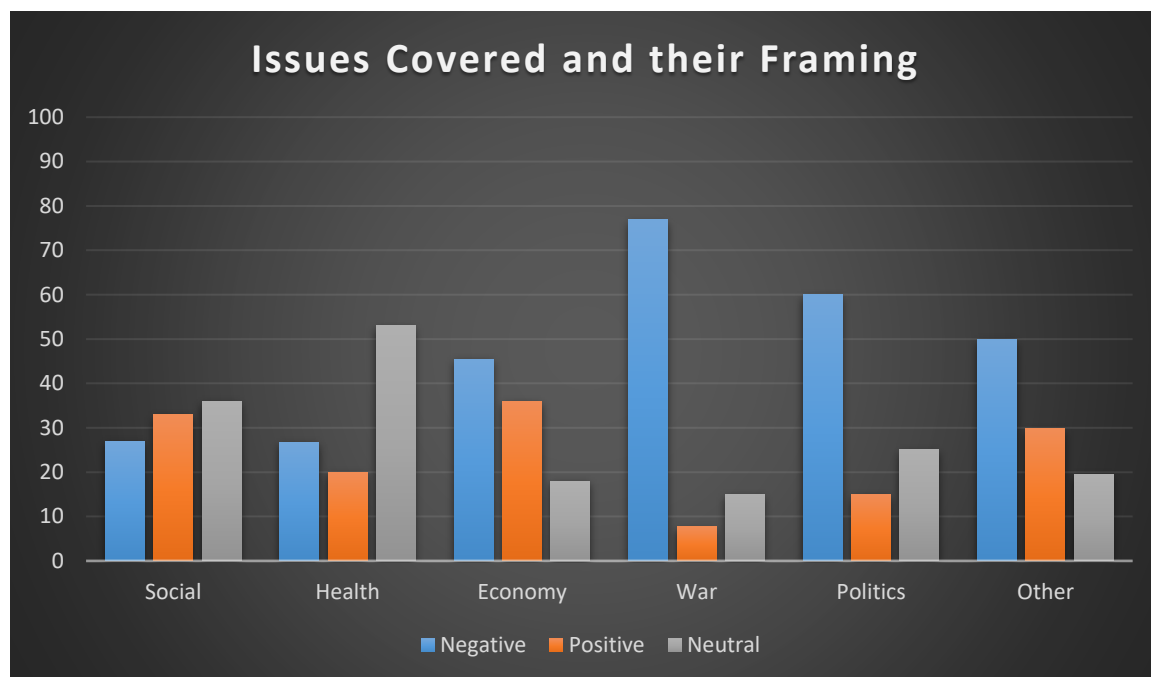
Table 6

*Sources Quoted in Other Articles*

<b>Sources</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local resident	13	29%
Local News Agencies	4	9%
Government officials	11	24%
Associated Press Reporter	1	2%
Foreign government official	2	4%
Foreign media	1	2%
Human right activists	1	2%
Law enforcement agencies	2	4%
Other	22	48%

This study found that these “other” stories focused more on “single individuals” with 15 (33%) of the stories covering news about “singles individuals,” seven (15%) focused on “cities” in African countries, seven (15%) on “other” stories in “regions,” of Africa, 10 (22%) on “other” stories in African “countries” and six (13%) reported “other” stories in Africa as a continent. This study found that 19 (41%) of these “other” stories were authored by “AP reporters of African origin,” two (4%) were authored by “AP reporters of Western origin,” one (2%) was authored by “AP editorial,” and 24 (52%) were authored by “other” media personnel. Examining the depth of coverage, this study found that 30 (65%) of the “other” stories were reported as “new Stories”, and 16 (35%)

as “continuing” stories. For full graphical representation of the coverage of Africa by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 (see figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Issues Covered by AP from January 2015 to January 2016 and how these issues were framed.

Note: Vertical axis is percentage.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Analysis and Implications

Having presented the data for the Associated Press coverage and framing of African news and events from January 2015 to January 2016, the categories developed and used for the coding and presentation of data for this study are discussed in this chapter. The top three issues that this study identified as receiving more attention from the AP in their coverage of Africa from January 2015 to January 2016 and factors that influenced the framing of the issues covered are discussed using the concept of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is applied because it is recognized as a key concept used in identifying what, when, who, where, why and how that guide us into answering the questions this study intends to answer (see p. 24 for research questions). I will initially present the descriptive information and then interpret the meaning of that information alongside narrative analysis of a sample of coded articles. I will be using three specific articles that correspond with the three most common coverage areas for my analysis.

As you read through this chapter, it is important to note that all articles analyzed, except the article on “religion in Africa” quoted multiples sources. Hence, the total number of sources quoted in all stories would be greater than the total number of articles analyzed. Also, the scope of coverage is greater than the total number of stories analyzed because some stories had wider scope in coverage (i.e., reported on multiple issues).



### Social

Social problems encompass issues that a small to representative group of people within a society disagree with or find undesirable. Research identified the prominent terms used by the Western media when reporting news on social issues in Africa as poverty, rape, disease, corruption, famine, and the inability to develop (Poncian, 2015; Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007; Bates, 2012; Fage, 1981). Going by the definition of social issues by research, this study found that 32% of AP reportage of African news from January 2015 to January 2016 focused on social issues. Judging from articles I have reviewed so far, in my opinion much hasn't changed in the focus of the Western media when covering Africa but interestingly, this study found that there is improvement in the framing of issues identified as social issues when compared to the findings of existing literature.

This study found that 27% of the stories on social issues reported by the AP between January 2015 and January 2016 were negatively framed, 33% were positively framed and 36% (the majority) were neutrally framed. The implication of this is that the AP in their coverage of news on social issues in Africa between January 2015 and January, 2016 were more neutral in framing and were also more positive than negative. It was also observed that 60% of the stories on social issues quoted local residents as sources which is a trend this study found to be present in stories that were framed with a more neutral and positive tone. Quoting residents evidently seems to be yielding more positivity and neutrality in framing than every other source identified in this study. A

brief examination of the randomly selected article from the sample analyzed for this study should aid you in understanding the coverage of social issues:

**Associated Press Online**

**October 27, 2015 Tuesday 11:47 AM GMT**

**Byline:** By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press

**Dateline:** JOHANNESBURG

**Top South African university to re-open after protests**

In the selected social article, it can be observed that the tone of presentation is progressive hence positive. It spotlights an issue that is handicapping the educational sector of the African country and introduces action taken by affected citizens in reaching a resolution. It also spotlights claim of severe violence but countered a confirmation that dismisses the existence of such actions. The writer briefly gave a background to the activities that led to the development of the current newsworthy event. This is professionalism being applied. This story identified and successfully answered the 5 Ws and H technique of standard news presentation. Comparing the findings of this study to the claims of existing research on the subject matter, there is a degree of difference between some aspect of AP coverage of African events from January 2015 to January 2016 and the claim of existing studies. Some existing research found that most stories about Africa are consistently negatively framed by the Western media (see “Africa in Western media” section in literature review), this study found that the coverage and framing of “social issues” which comprises of stories about child abuse, rape, alcoholism;

affirmative actions, abortion, animal rights, birth control etc. were more neutrally framed between January 2015 and January 2016.

### Politics

Local politics is one of the issues previous studies identified as a core focus for the Western media when covering Africa. Going by the findings of this study, 21% of the 103 stories analyzed reported political issues in Africa rating politics as one of the top three issues the *Associated Press* focused on in her coverage of Africa from January 2015 to January 2016. Reviewing research on the subject, I observed that when reporting stories about African politics, words such as “instability, thuggery, electoral malpractices, corruption” are repeatedly used (Nittle, 2012; Golan, 2008; Fitzgerald, 1987). This study found the consistent use of the same words and phrases in the articles reviewed on AP’s coverage of political news from African countries between January 2015 to January 2016. The findings of the present study therefore support the claim of existing literature that political issues in Africa are consistently framed negatively. Reading the sample article below coded as “political story,” the use of the identified negative terms can be observed.

**December** 30, 2015 Wednesday 11:28 AM GMT

**Byline:** By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press

**Dateline:** JOHANNESBURG

#### **Tribal king in South Africa faces jail time**

From the article, it is clear that the frequency of the crimes reported to have been perpetuated by the tribal king is not specified which presents the story in a manner that

suggests that the entire community led by the tribal king is suffering political unrest. Also, an in-depth explanation (background of the story) on the cause of the actions perpetrated by the tribal king is not provided in the presentation. The story is a one-sided story framed to present the side of the Western-styled government with no statement from either the traditional government (the chief, any member of his cabinet) or any prominent (i.e., human right activists, social workers) member of the affected community.

With 60% (the majority) of the stories on politics analyzed in this study being framed in like manner and poorly presented, this study supports the argument that most of the political issues in Africa are poorly covered and negatively framed. In the writings of Makunike (1993):

We hear about famines and coups, but not the rejuvenation of its cities and the cultural vitality of its village life...about oppression and massacres, but not education, economic self-help and political development... about poaching and habitat destruction, but not ongoing active efforts at conservation, reforestation and environmental awareness. (p. 12)

Makunike's submissions sums up the argument on Western media coverage of political events in Africa. Though the media world-over is known for her interest in negative events as news stories, reporters should put more effort in investigating all sides of every story they cover.

### Other

Existing literature identified health, social, and war stories as issues that the Western media focused on in their coverage and presentation of Africa (Fage, 1981; Golan, 2008; Ebo, 1992; Ojo, 2012). This study found that 47% of the 103 stories about Africa reported by the AP from January 2015 to January 2016 focused on “other” issues. It is worthy to note that stories that were identified as occurring frequently in this category are stories about conservation, sports, wildlife, tourism, fishing and education. The implication of the result of this study is that the focus of the Western media (*Associated Press* specifically) in their coverage of Africa from January 2015 to January 2016 shifted from “social” issues (which majority of previous study identified as more prominent) to “other” issues. Although the focus on issues shifted, the framing and presentation conforms to the popular claim of Africa being negatively presented in stories. My stand is based on the fact that 50% of the stories coded as “other” stories in this study were framed negatively, 30% framed positively and 20%t were neutrally framed. Let’s take a look at the randomly selected article coded as “other” below to observe its framing.

**Associated Press Online**

**September 25, 2015 Friday 2:22 PM GMT**

**Byline: By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press**

**Dateline: JOHANNESBURG**

**South Africa disputes number of poacher deaths in park**

Reading through the selected article, it can be observed that the writer in presenting the story, cited sources like government officials, community representatives, civic organizations and presented the background information on the causes of the event reported. Though negatively framed, the details of the event seem not to be exaggerated. Worthy of note because of its high frequency in the data, this category (others) does not contribute much to the development and argument of the present study. This is because it lumps series of events together. Future study on the subject is encouraged to distinctively and exclusively focus on examining the coverage and framing of each of the issues lumped together as “other” in this study.

Using narrative analysis, it is imperative that we examine those factors that influenced the way a story is covered, presented and perceived. Per Hyde (1912) there are certain questions that run through the reader’s mind. These questions are in the form of “what, who, where, when, why and how” (p. 38) and the roles they play in the coverage, framing and perception of the story. Tomashevsky (1965) thought of a story “as a journey from one situation to another” (p.70). The next section of this thesis expounds on factors that is perceived to have influenced the presentation/framing of Africa by the *Associated Press* from January 2015 to January 2016.

### Depth of Coverage

The depth of coverage was investigated to see how much time reporters dedicated to investigating stories being covered and how they approached the framing of these stories. This study used “word count” and coverage continuity as the metrics for measuring the time dedicated to researching events before and after coverage, editing,

and presentation. The analysis of data shows that the “word count” of all 103 articles that covered African stories from January 2015 to January 2016 ranged from 105 to 500 words and 85% of the stories were reported as “new stories.” This implies that majority of the stories on Africa as covered by the AP between January 2015 and January 2016 lacked depth in content and continuity. This is in line with the claim of a study of stories on Africa that appeared in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from the end of March to Mid-August of 2000 which showed that all 89 published articles on Africa lacked sufficient context (Ojo, 2012). Not giving much attention to the progression and development of events before presenting them as news stories handicaps the readers and deprive them the opportunity of in-depth knowledge of the issues presented hence the readers judgement of the events reported is limited to the little they read about the situation.

#### Sources

It is “common sense” that the interpretation of an event and the ability of a writer to accurately present the circumstances surrounding a story largely depend on how knowledgeable the writer is on the sequence of activities that led to such event. Even in a world of expanding voices, accuracy is the foundation upon which everything else is built — context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate (Patterson, 2013). The Western media is constantly accused of misinterpreting issues in Africa when presenting the continent. This study found that 60% of the 103 articles analyzed cited residents as sources in their stories. Citing local actors in 60% of the stories from the selected sample analyzed for this study is an effort in the direction towards achieving some level of accuracy. The findings of this study that coverage of Africa is shifting framing from

hardcore negative tone to more of neutral and positive tone is a point that supports this claim.

The shortcoming of this approach is that majority of the residents of African countries speak local dialects, hence there is a chance that the contexts (background information) of the events covered and the information communicated with the reporter would be misinterpreted and misrepresented. Nyabola, (2014) picked on one of such cases of misrepresentation of events in a response to a South Sudan story reported in the *Guardian*.

A *Guardian* correspondent offered an analysis of an on-going crisis in South Sudan that, judging from the comments on the website, was well received outside South Sudan. Yet, the reaction from the South Sudanese online community was the opposite. Relatively well-known *twitterati* roundly criticized the article as a complete misread of the situation on the ground (para 1-2).

Although, Westerners should be educated on how to validate or fact-check the content of news stories, the media need to improve on checking the credibility of information gathered from their sources in reportage. For this study, 49% of the 103 *Associated Press* articles analyzed cited “other” (unidentified) persons as sources of stories. This proves a major challenge to the credibility of the sources quoted in these articles. A credible and reliable source should be defined, accurately identified and probable. An article is considered reliable if it is clear and concise about sources. Journalists should be as transparent as possible about sources so audiences can make their own assessment of the information (Patterson, 2013).



### Dateline

In this study, 84% of the 103 articles on Africa as covered by the *Associated Press* are stories from South Africa. This finding takes us back into the “cultural affinity” determinant of Western media coverage of international news which proposes that viewers and gate keepers of the Western media are likely to relate more closely and be more interested in events that occur in a culture/nation that is culturally like theirs (Hester, 1973). South Africa is most likely perceived as more culturally similar to the Western world than other countries in Africa and that explains why majority of the articles analyzed covered stories originating from South Africa.

South Africa is a country located on the southernmost tip of the African continent that had the longest leadership of the whites and is still very populated with European immigrants. With the exception of South Africa and Libya (which are countries that had white leadership the longest), both propelled by extreme convictions, Africa is considered as a continent that is not a player in the great global power game. In short, Africa is not deemed to be newsworthy (Fitzgerald, 1987). The Western media need to be country specific in her tagging of news stories from the continent of Africa.

### Authors

This study found that 55% of the 103 stories analyzed were authored by “other” media personnel. In the coding sheet, “other” as a category under “writer of the story” was operationalized as writers who are not identified by their names in the articles and writers who are not from Africa or any of the Western countries. (Please see appendix for how origin of authors was found).

The data revealed that AP staff of African origin authored 53% of the 103 articles, AP staff of Western origin authored 13% of stories and the AP editorial authored 13% of the articles. With “others” ranking highest in authorship of stories, the issue of credibility in coverage becomes a concern once more. Another point of view is that stories covered and reported by AP reporters of African origin who are not from the country they were covering also stands the chance of being wrongly understood and framed. This is on the premise that cultural differences and differences in the language codes of the people of the area that is being covered would differ from that of the non-local reporter. For instance, Torchia who is from South Africa, is likely to misinterpret the details of a newsworthy event in Nigerian where he is the bureau chief of the AP because the cultural beliefs and language codes of the people of Nigeria differs from that of the people of South Africa.

In global conversations about Africa, 53 nations are often lumped together as one (Ebo, 1992). Africa is a continent and should not be lumped into a single country hence the AP should make an effort to set up more bureaus in the continent. Having more bureaus in the second largest continent of the world would mean more reporting staff would be on ground to research and report local events appropriately.

Another factor identified to likely influence the coverage and framing of African countries is organizational policies. Most, if not all of the media organizations in the Western world are owned by private organizations. A way to move towards a more liberal form of coverage that ensures that citizens are exposed to a more plural source of information would be the review of organizational policies by the world organizations

like the United Nations to ensure accurate information is presented when covering events that occur in countries of the world. The media should be operated by nonprofit organizations and journalist operated corporative and should be thought of as public utility that is focused on the distribution of people's aspirations, ideas, praise, and criticism of the state and the society (Picard, 1985).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

As the world is evolving and intercultural coexistence and relationship is becoming more popular globally, perceptions of the so-called third world by members of the Western communities need to be reexamined. One of the many important roles of the press in any society is to communicate with its readers in a way it understands and interprets the world. However, if that interpretation of the world is fundamentally flawed, then the media cannot hold a mirror up to the world, be independent, nor be the guardian of truth (Biney, 1997).

Recognizing the role, the media play in shaping perceptions and world views, this study attempted to answer these research questions:

RQ 1. What are the dominant issues contained in *Associated Press* coverage of news in Africa from January 2015 to January 2016?

RQ 2. What are the dominant frames in *Associated Press* presentation of these news events?

In answering these questions, this study examined the coverage of Africa from January 2015 to January 2016 using a sample of articles collected from the online services of the *Associated Press* as unit of analysis. The findings of this study contribute

to ongoing research on intercultural communication and efforts by scholars towards reconstructing and redefining the image and perception of Africa in the Western world.

This study identified the top three issues the Associated Press focused on in their coverage of Africa between January 2015 and January 2016 as “Social issues,” “political issues,” and issues on education, tourism, conservation, sports lumped together as “other” issues. This study also examined the framing of these identified frequently covered issues. The hypothesis of this study is that the type of sources quoted in news stories from Africa, the part of the continent that received more attention in coverage and the depth of coverage are factors that influence how Africa is perceived in the Western world. The analysis of the data for this study found that:

- The 103 articles collected from the online news service of the AP lack depth in coverage and presentation with word range of 105 to 500 and lacked continuity in coverage.
- These news stories analyzed lack credibility in sources cited as unnamed and unidentified persons (others) were cited as sources in over 65% of the articles.
- With higher percentages of all issues covered focusing on “single individuals” and specific country (South Africa) in scope of coverage, there is a limitation in the focus of coverage of news stories. This finding supports the Fitzgerald (1987) position that Africa is often viewed as a vast black hole fringed by Libya and South Africa. The fault in this style of selective coverage and presentation is that an entire continent is framed by the events of one or two countries.

Being recognized as giants in the media industry world over, the AP needs to improve its coverage and presentation of international events. The management of the AP needs to work on gaining deeper access to relevant sources for information on issues they cover. It is also imperative that the AP improve its scope of coverage and presentation of Africa or change the title of their news section from “International/African News” to “South African news.” That 85% of the 103 stories analyzed in this study were identified as “new stories” also implies that the AP did not invest quality time into investigating and following up on the development of issues covered from January 2015 to January 2016. Tomashevsky (1965) thought of a story “as a journey from one situation to another” (p.70). Following up on issues covered would improve the knowledge of interested readers on the sequence of activities that led to the events being reported in articles.

With technology changing media landscapes globally, I encourage media users who have particular interest in stories about Africa to find alternative source(s) from the online service of Africa based media organizations like *Pulse News*, *Sun News Online*, and the *Guardian Nigeria*, etc. There are many resources outside the pages of traditional newspapers, plenty of project advice on *Pinterest*, and more than enough information and opinions on coverage of important events in Africa on any given social media newsfeed. Africans who domicile in Africa are encouraged to seize the opportunity provided by social media to popularize alternative sources with more accurate information on issues thought to have been misrepresented by the Western media. Though much might not be achieved due to selective usage of media by individuals, people who are really and truly

interested in fact checking issues would be able to access these alternative sources in evaluating the credibility of stories emanating out of the continent.

On the part of the Western media, the quality of reporting on Africa could be vastly improved if the media consulted and interviewed more African activists and organizations rather than interviewing non-literate citizens who are barely proficient in English language, hence poorly express their knowledge on the events in interviews. International organizations that are genuinely interested in the situation must present all sides of the story in their analysis. Broader reporting would add needed depth to coverage of African issues and help to avoid clichés about the continent (Nittle, 2012). Achieving all of these and more would be a bold step towards making sure that readers are provided credible and accurate information.

#### Limitations/Further Research

The online news service of the *Associated Press* was the only source for the data used for this study. Future research should examine other forms of media such as radio, magazines, television, news transcripts, online media, social media or newspapers. A look at other news organizations' coverage of news from the continent of Africa alongside the AP would have afforded me the opportunity to examine a wider scope of the data on issues that are dominantly covered, the scope and depth of coverage and how stories are generally framed.

Narrowing some of the broader categories like "social," "politics," and "others" into smaller unit of analysis like corruption, crime, terrorism, child abuse, rape would have generated several new leads for this study. Future research should attempt to

examine these specific categories independently. The majority of the articles analyzed for this study reported stories about single individuals and stories originating from South Africa as opposed to Africa. This posed a major challenge to my ability to inquire into how stories about other parts of Africa are being covered and framed. Examination of the contents of other media organizations may lead the study in another direction that would yield a more robust data in terms of scope of coverage.

Although the result of this study proposes that 55% of the stories analyzed were covered by AP reporters of “African origin,” there is the likelihood that the coverage and presentation of the stories was influenced by organizational policies. Future research should examine the impact of organizational policies on the coverage, framing and presentations of international news stories.

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## APPENDIX

### ASSOCIATED PRESS COVERAGE OF AFRICA CODING SCHEME

Associated Press coverage of Africa, 2015-2016

Adukwu Samuel Atadoga

#### **Sources Searched** (LexisNexis)

News Agency: *Associated Press*

**Where to find stories 1-1000:** The story files (from 01/01/2015 to 01/31/2016) are available in the International news section of the AP repository.

- Stories 1-1000 are the Associated Press news stories, and are in a very long single word document entitled Newspaper\_Stories,\_Combined\_Papers\_Associate2016-02-22\_13-40

#### **General directions:**

1. Follow the coding questions below and record the answers for each story by ticking from the options. If for some reason the story turns out to have nothing to do with events happening in Africa they should not be coded (we've tried to weed all of these out).
2. Code the story based on the relevant content. Most of the stories are quite brief and easy to read (below 500-word count).

3. For item G, to identify the origin of story author please look up author's professional page and run a google search of author's name. Compare data returned from search query with data available on author's professional page(s) to validate accuracy. Read biographical information on author's official websites, company staff websites, wiki pages and articles about author. Pay attention to information that indicate place of origin. Please code "author's origin" as "other" if data on the place of origin about an author across all searched databases are inconsistent.
4. For item H, code as "new" story if it is first time reporting of event or no indication that writer will do a follow up story on the events reported. Code as "continuing" story if story is a continuation of previously reported event or if writer indicates that additional reporting will be done as event develops. Code as "unknown" if unsure of story direction.

#### CODING KEY

- A. Story number (*These are numbered consecutively. Start at 1. Use the LexisNexis numbers 1-1000*) \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Coder number (*Enter your coder number for this story. coder a number, 1 - 2.*)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Story Date (*MO/DA/YR -- e.g., 12/25/2015*) \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Word Count \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Section \_\_\_\_\_

F. Location of the story (dateline) \_\_\_\_\_

G. Who is the writer of the story? (place of origin of author).

1. Editorial
2. African Reporter
3. Western Reporter
4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

H. Is this a “new” or “continuing” story?

1. New
2. Continuing
3. Unknown

I. What issue/event(s) is being discussed in this story?

1. Economy:
  - a. Industrial actions
  - b. Business
  - c. Economic policy changes
  - d. Labor/union group actions
  - e. Import and export
  - f. Agriculture
  - g. Natural resources
  - h. Employment statistics
  - i. Food production/distribution
  - j. Investments



- k. Local/National/International debt
- l. Taxation
- m. Salary and wages
- n. Other (any other issue considered to be about the economy)

2. Health:

- a. Medicine
- b. Hospitalization
- c. Pandemic/Endemic/epidemic
- d. Immunization
- e. Disease outbreak/control
- f. Vaccinations
- g. Health research
- h. Pharmaceuticals
- i. Health facilities
- j. Health policies
- k. Mental health
- l. Drug regulations
- m. Other (any other issue considered to be about health)

3. War

- a. Gun violence
- b. Political thuggery
- c. Crimes

- d. Burglary
- e. Terrorism
- f. Tribal wars
- g. Local boundary conflicts
- h. National boundary cases
- i. Other (any other issue considered to be about war or security instability)

#### 4. Politics

- a. Elections
- b. Local politics
- c. Tribal conflicts
- d. Chieftaincy
- e. Governance
- f. Political unrest
- g. Political party
- h. Political appointments
- i. National Security
- j. Policy changes/implementation
- k. Other (any other issue considered to be about politics)

#### 5. Religion

- a. Christian news

- b. Islamic news events
- c. Other local religion news events
- d. Local religious festivals
- e. News about religious groups
- f. Other (all religion related news events)

6. Social

- a. Poverty
- b. Rape
- c. Disease
- d. Corruption
- e. Famine/starvation
- f. Family conflicts
- g. Abortion
- h. Marriage
- i. Court cases
- j. Drug abuse
- k. Child abuse
- l. Gender discrimination
- m. Oppression
- n. Population
- o. Domestic violence
- p. Other (any other issue considered to be social)

7. Other

- a. Education
- b. Science and technology
- c. Transportation
- d. Sports
- e. Wildlife
- f. Conservation
- g. Fishing
- h. Tourism
- i. Entertainment
- j. Other (any other issue considered to be other)

J. What is the tone of the issue being covered?

- 1. Positive
- 2. Negative
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Combination

K. If there is a second issue, what is the tone?

- 1. Positive
- 2. Negative
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Combination

L. Who are the article sources (quoted or mentioned as a source)?

1. A local resident
2. A local news agency
3. Government official
4. Health representative
5. Religious representative
6. A community leader
7. Foreign media
8. Unnamed source
9. Foreign government official
10. Human rights activist
11. Law enforcement agency
12. Other\_\_\_\_\_

M. What is the scope of the article?

1. Single individual
2. City
3. Regional
4. Country
5. Continent